

CLAIMS:

1. A local data provision system comprising:
a plurality of transmitters each located at a respective entity having a limited range of physical utility, and each transmitter being arranged repeatedly or on demand to transmit wirelessly a signal carrying data indicating the presence of the respective entity over a range substantially coterminous with the range of utility of that entity; and
a personal information unit comprising a user interface for signaling information to a user and a receiver arranged to receive the availability data and to cause the user interface to signal information to the user in dependence on the received availability data.
2. A local data provision system as claimed in claim 1, wherein the signal is a radio signal.
3. A local data provision system as claimed in claim 1, comprising at least one status sensor located at one of the entities and capable of sensing the status of the entity and causing the respective transmitter to transmit wirelessly a signal carrying data indicating the status of the respective entity.
4. A local data provision system as claimed in claim 1, wherein the signal carrying data indicating the presence of a respective entity includes data indicating the type of the entity.
5. A local data provision system as claimed in claim 4, wherein the personal information unit includes a memory capable of storing a plurality of entity types and the personal information unit is arranged to cause the user interface to signal information to the user only if the received availability data includes data indicating one of the stored types.

6. A local data provision system as claimed in claim 5, wherein the personal information unit includes input means for allowing a user to specify the plurality of entity types that are to be stored.

7. A local data provision system as claimed in claim 1, wherein the personal information unit is a cellular telephone.

8. A local data provision system as claimed in claim 1, wherein the personal information unit is capable of non-visually alerting a user in dependence on the received availability data.

9. A local data provision system as claimed in claim 4, wherein the personal information unit is capable of alerting a user with one of a plurality of alerts in dependence on the type indicated by received availability data.

10. A local data provision system as claimed in claim 1, wherein the personal information unit is a portable unit.